

M. M. Kaye's Shadow of the Moon: A Study in Clash of Cultures and Religions in the British-India

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Abstract:- The content of the paper is an outcome of several years of thinking having lingered for a considerable period in the Researcher's mind. Since the Researcher had started dealing with the reading and with the problem of making of Historical Novel, there have been several facets and dimensions, that attracted the attention and ultimately resulted in this Interdisciplinary research paper, presented before the global readership to have more insights and views on the topic which is the backbone of creation of any historical novel.

(M)ary (M)argaret Kaye, through her bestselling historical novels namely Shadow of the Moon (1908), Far Pavilions (1962), and Trade Wind (1978) has successfully recreated the socio-cultural past of the then periods, focusing on the then area of the Globe with the then customs and traditions of the people along with the individual and community psyche towards an individual and community too. The wars for lands, wars for the spread of religion, wars out of hatred, wars between empires, the traditional rivalry between races and religions, their understanding of the term called humanity and their attitudes towards humanity, their tearing out between the self and community orientations, their definitions of life and achievements, their experience of pains and pleasures, agony and anxiety is the subject matter placed and presented by M. M. Kaye in all her three historical novels. The present paper deals with the psychological setup and mental makeup of Kaye's real-life characters portrayed in her Shadow of the Moon, with these emotions and issues presented artistically by the author with various types of feelings and kaleidoscopic situations, resulting in the 'never to end world' in reader's mind, having a fair combination of fact and fiction and finally making her novel plenty of this most important characteristic of any Historical Novel.

Keywords: Clash of Cultures, Religions, Psychological set-up, Historical Novel, fact and fiction.

1. Introduction

(M)ary (M)argaret Kaye, through her bestselling historical novels namely Shadow of the Moon (1908), Far Pavilions (1962), and Trade Wind (1978) has successfully recreated the socio-cultural past of the then periods, focusing on the then area of the Globe with the then customs and traditions of the people along with the individual and community psyche towards an individual and community too. The wars for lands, wars for the spread of religion, wars out of hatred, wars between empires, the traditional rivalry between races and religions, their understanding of the term called humanity and their attitudes towards humanity, their tearing out between the self and community orientations, their definitions of life and achievements, their experience of pains and pleasures, agony and anxiety is the subject matter placed and presented by Kaye in all her three historical novels.

The present paper deals with the clash of cultures and religions as well as the psychological setup and mental makeup of Kaye's real-life characters portrayed in her Shadow of the Moon, with these emotions and issues presented artistically by the author with various types of feelings and kaleidoscopic situations, resulting in the 'never to end world' in reader's mind, having a fair combination of fact and fiction and finally making her novel plenty of this most important characteristic of any Historical Novel.

M. M. Kaye tries to depict the life of 19th & 20th Century British India, when the three important religions, namely Hindu, Muslim & Christian, were responsible for the creation of a heterogeneous society. The First one, Hindu, being Oriental and having its origin in India, the latter being Occidental, had their own sets of ideas about the God, World, Creation & purpose of human life and had great similarities in faiths. These customs and traditions, faiths & beliefs have had great roles to play in individual and social life. 'In the East, women are kept in their proper places,' said Colonel Abuthnot with a twinkle. 'An Indian gentleman would consider it highly improper to allow his womenfolk to gallivant about in public semi-naked. As for permitting them to be clasped about the waist to prance to music in the arms of a strange man, such a thing would be unthinkable.' (Kaye, pp.164-165)

The reader finds that these characters are born free but everywhere they are chained by the customs, traditions, and set of expectations and are seen carrying the burden of emotions thereby. The narration given below acquaints us with India's one of such most important customs having a clear idea of the psychological burden the male carries until the birth of a son. To get rid, the culture has suggested the custom of adopting a son.

It is one more reason behind the deep desire for a male child as offspring. Hindus have a strong belief that if there is no son to perform the last rites in the event of the death of a man, his soul does not attain the Moksha (The Salvation). As per the religious expectations and teaching one has to think of emancipation from rebirth and that should be the aim of every individual's life. If somebody does not have a direct heir, a remedy has been suggested by the religion, to continue the lineage and also to perform the funeral after the death of any person, one may adopt a son as his successor. M.M. Kaye has frequently narrated such customs by presenting stories related to the Indian characters. (Kaye, 183)

The East India Company, whatever the cost wanted to overrun the princely states in India, which were not at all united. For the British, India was a bunch of warring kingdoms. The custom of adopting a male child from close kin or so and the belief associated with it proved very useful for the expansion of the British Raj. The portrayal of the Indian custom is authentic and matches the psychological setup of the then society.

The Kings and Princes of these princely states had got panic-stricken as this new rule of the Company Raj was going for the expansion of the Empire under the pretext of 'having no direct heir to the Throne' and refusing the custom of adoption. The ruling King was under social & individual burden on one hand and facing psychological disturbances at the individual level as he would be deprived of the Moksha due to having failed to produce a male child.

The said custom as it was deeply rooted and fixed in the blood, the members of the society including a layman, had started accepting the Company Rule right and started accepting without any objection. It had helped the Company to tighten its position by weakening the fabric of unseen social support. It also tightened the hold of the East India Company on Indian states by questioning the rationality behind such insane thinking. Moreover, this spirit of questioning was also supported by enlightened Hindu leaders with scientific temperament and by those who wanted to free India from such blind beliefs and customs. The said custom was directly associated with the lives of the Rajas and Maharajas of India and hence it had a direct effect on the lives of the people.

The episodes on the pages of history potentially prove that the feelings of hatred, prophecies, stories of loss and gains, social desire to achieve some common goals, genocides, programs, planning for the same, strategies to attain something historic including the killing of the people of specific race have been carried forward by generations to generations along with the painful stories of the past tensions, unseen terrors as have been the stories of partitions. Underneath there lies some motto to grab something desired by the forefathers but remained to be accomplished. These burdens are also part of every individual and social life and no wonder, they play a major role in shaping an individual's social life. For instance, the Indians' failure to free India from the British, shattered like anything during their defeat in the 1757 War of Plassey, however the same feeling of revenge was carried forward by the next generations and prepared the ground for the 1857 revolt exactly after a hundred years.

The story of the Prophecy of Hundred Years is also referred to by the British historian J. W. Kaye in his pioneering work on the Indian mutiny of 1857. J. W. Kaye narrates the episode of history and says the new year dawned and

there was something suggestive in the number of the year i. e Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Seven. In 1757, the English, through the Company, had established their dominion in India by the conquest of Bengal. For a hundred years, they had now, by the progressive action of continued enrichment, been spreading their paramount rule over the country, and there were prophesies, said to be the ancient date, which foretold the downfall of the English power at the end of this century of supremacy. (Kaye, J. 484-85)

As mentioned earlier the Battle of Plassey, took place in 1757 and set the foundation of the British Raj in India. Though the British won the war, the defeated Indians believed that the rule would have an end exactly after hundred years after the battle of Plassey. The event has been recorded as the prophecy of a hundred years in Indian History. So they all predicted the fall of the empire in the year 1857. The rebellious

spirit of the hurt soldiers and freedom fighters was inflamed by such prophecies. The Prophecy of a Hundred Years prepared the rebels emotionally for the revolt. The appeal of such a prophecy was very strong for the superstitious Indians, who may be then of whatever caste and creed.

These communities, while getting dislocated by the invaders, carried with them something that remains responsible for them reuniting again after thousands of years. The story of the Israel reunion is an example beyond any match history has ever witnessed. "The yearning for Jerusalem has always been a central theme of Jewish life. Jews have resided almost continuously in Jerusalem under many conquerors throughout the centuries. In the modern era, the Jewish community has formed the majority in Jerusalem since the mid- 1800s. As the population grew in the first half of the twentieth century, the city became the political center of the Jewish community of the British Mandate, which preceded the establishment of the State of Israel." (Boulevard, 2022)

Coming back to India, the Indian freedom fighters were not ready to spare a single British person and even an Indian who wanted the British Rule to be continued in India. Niaz, being pro-British in their eyes & though he was an Indian Muslim, was heartlessly killed by the revolvers. Indian freedom fighters did not trust even their people, and even their leaders, who had secret ties with the British. Kishan Prasad, who was a Hindu, a Brahmin, and a man of great learning too, is shown as one of the plotters of the revolt and the leader of the Oudh freedom fighters. A year ago, while returning to India from England, Kishan-Prasad had fallen into the sea, and he was saved by the protagonist Alex. Though Alex knew that Kishan Prasad was anti-British, he had saved his life out of human consideration. Kaye narrates the incident. "He beat the water again and shouted and the creature shot away, hovered, and returned. It seemed to hand in the water above him and he realized suddenly that if it came at him while he held to the hencoop, the rush of its great body would overturn that makeshift raft and dislodge Kishan Prasad. He had forgotten that Kishan Prasad was an enemy whose death he would have welcomed and whom a few short minutes ago he had been passionately regretting that he had not left to die." (Kaye, p.150) This sense of debt and gratitude to be repaid someday was always felt by Kishan Prasad, because for him "the life he was living was just like debt, which he has to pay one day." And the day came, when Kishan Prasad entrapped Alex, with the help of two other rebels, who were eager to kill Alex. But Kishan Prasad forbade them and said "'Stand back!' cried Kishan Prasad, 'I am a Brahmin; and if you would kill this man, you will have first to kill me.' The babble died abruptly, and the men drew back, for they were Hindus, and to kill a Brahmin would be a sacrilege unspeakable, dooming them to the nethermost of hells, and to become outcasts among their fellowmen. (Kaye, pp 499-500)

Here, M. M. Kaye narrates one more Indian and specifically Hindu conviction concerned with the Brahmins. No one is permitted to kill a Brahmin and a cow, as both are divine and sacred to Hindus. If anyone committed such a grave sin, society would exile him and break relations with him completely. It is also believed that the criminal's soul enters hell and not heaven. The novelist has thus very successfully exploited the incidents of personal life disturbing the individuals in their duties, and historical role and forcing choices in them.

Similarly, there are different practices of cremation in different faiths. Hindus believe that the body is made up of the basic five elements called the Earth, Water, Air, Light, and the Sky and hence prefer to restore the same by burning it again with these five basic elements. put the dead body on the funeral pyre. They prefer to burn it to make it. On the other hand, among Muslims and Christians, the burial of the dead body is prescribed. Both religions have their origin in the West, we find several similarities in their cultures. There is a basic difference

between both Eastern and Western cultures. For instance, Winter's father Conde d Ballesteros, expresses his surprise at the death of his wife Anne Marie and the hasty burial of her dead body, in an accustomed manner. "Anne Marie died in the first week of February... As it must be in the East, the funeral took place within a few hours of Anne Marie's death; but to the Conde, although he was familiar with this abrupt disposal of the dead, the short space of time between his wife's death and her interment was particularly shocking... 'It did not seem right to Don Ramon that Anne Marie should be hurried thus to her grave, and when the rest of the household had retired to bed he took candles and flint and went by night to the little marble mausoleum he had built so many years ago to house the bodied of himself and his family. Five of his children already lay within it, and now Anne Marie had gone to join them.' (Kaye, 21).

There are two different practices of funeral, namely Indian and Spanish i.e. Christian, as described by Kaye. The basic difference between both cultures is the abrupt or gradual disposal of the dead body. Commenting on Walayat Shah's changed attitude towards his wife, Kaye narrates, that Wilayat Shah's tolerance of the *firangis* (British) changed to a corroding and vindictive hatred. And with that hatred had arisen, like a phoenix from the fire, the memory of the past glories of his race. He had rarely thought of the history of his people while the Muslim kingdom of Oudh still stood, but now that Oudh – almost the last Mohammedan state in India – had fallen, he and many like him turned to look at the glorious past when the horned moon of Islam had blazed above India from Peshawar to the Deccan, and the Great Muguls had ruled all Hind. The fire of that great Empire had sunk now to a feeble flicker, as though it had been no more than the light of a thousand chirags – the small oil lamps lit for the festival of Dewali – that together blaze like a golden bonfire, but which die out one by one as the oil burns low or the night winds blow. Only a few of the lamps that had once made that bright glare remained, for the hot winds of the warlike Mahrattas, of the Rajputs, of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikhs, had extinguished them one by one. And then a greater wind had arisen: the cold wind of 'John Company' blowing in from beyond the Black Water and breathing upon the last dying flicker of the Empire of the Moguls. (Kaye, p.383).

Jehad has been the main means for the spread of Islam used across the world in any period. Kaye records the historical fact with the help of a few Muslim characters as her sources. 'This thing is in the hands of all Mussulmans,' said Niaz, 'and in the mosques also they preach a Jihad. I have heard too that it has been promised that Ghazi- ud-din Bahadur Shah, the king of Delhi, shall be restored to his own so that once more the Mogul will rule in Hind.' 'And what say the Hindus who hear such talk?' asked Alex. (Kaye, p.374)

The widespread and blood- dimmed feeling of hatred was also aptly depicted by the novelist. The freedom fighters were not at all ready to spare any of the British, whether he was a child or an adult. The secret meetings of these revolvers, their discussions, and their actions are authentically recorded by Kaye in *Shadow of the Moon*. Alex enters one of such secret meetings, where he is asked to share the passcode before his entry to prove his identity as a member of the group of revolvers. 'Give the word.' 'A white goat for Kali.' 'Pass, brother.' The lathi dropped and Alex moved on into the open air. (Kaye, p.191)

Human sacrifice was somehow common in the then-Indian society. M. M. Kaye, in her historical romance, narrates one such incident. The anxiety out of the dilemma, the moment of choice between duty and desire, itself has been well depicted by Kaye by narrating the event of the massacre in Lucknow. 'He is going to die!' wept Mrs. Hossack hysterically. Rocking herself to and fro and wringing her hands. 'I know he will die! ...with no doctor...no proper food...no medicines...this dreadful, horrible house. Oh, Jimmy – Jimmy!'... For a week gunfire and crashing detonation of buildings being blown up shook Lucknow, but no one seemed to know how the battle went...Havelock died in that month. (Kaye, pp 603-604)

The dance of death had created havoc in the minds of the characters. It is impossible to measure the effects of the dreadful conditions in the city and the panic spread across the country. 'He is not dead,' she told Ameera. If he were I would feel it; here in my heart. But there were times when she was not sure; when terror would suddenly overtake her and she would think of her and she would think of him lying dead or dying in Lunjore – tortured or wounded or sick. And when those black times came upon her, she would run to her room... (Kaye 607)

The above explanation stands for the feeling of insecurity, the shadow of death manifesting the hours of life surrounded by every type of danger and death moving around. Winter finds herself a victim of situations. At the

level of imagination, she is preparing herself for the hours full of horrors and moments of trial. "But the roar of the guns meant no more to her than the cawing of the crows for the pains had started before dawn and the guns were only a dim and disregarded background to the ordeal of birth. ... It was not an easy birth, and there had been times when Ameera and Mumtaz Begum and others of the women who were continuously in and out of the painted room had looked at each other in fear and anxiety. But Winter remembered a long hot agonizing day in the Hiran Minar, and Alex voice talking to Lottie explaining encouraging soothing, and it was as if he spoke to her now as he had spoken then to Lottie telling her not to be afraid and she had not been afraid. (Kaye, 607-608)

There hardly remains any scope for personal priorities during situations like wars. The moments of birth and death are no exceptions and no time to rejoice and lamentations. The hearts of those who hold swords call for help in the name of humanity but seldom remember when others need it. Innocents and weak are the first victims having their state beyond any measure of mapping.

Towards the conclusion, let's understand the need to understand the psychological setup and mental makeup of the historical novel, without which the successful creation of a historical novel seems impossible. The recreation of the past in its totality then becomes the prime concern of the historical novelist. For the same purpose, it is very much essential for him to become one with the same is important. He selects some segment or period of the past and attempts to revisit the development of the event since its inception or roots by diving deep into it. The historical novelist touches upon all major and minor causes of the event or events, which remain at the central position and serve as the backdrop to the story. We generally find that any historical novel deals with a few decades or sometimes a hundred years of history and concentrates on a few chosen events that change the history of the country or affect the larger public life for a considerable period. For the same purpose, the novelist needs to put himself in the position of the characters and their psychological mindset thus becoming his concern to dwell upon.

What is available to the novelist are the recorded facts, some anecdotes and events, stories, rumours, folk stories, myths, and material that has been carried away by the generations of historians. But while dealing with the past and while deriving conclusions from it, there remains the problem of the authenticity of the matter available and the way events took place. Still, the stories of actual happenings, and development of the events are miles apart. Everything planned seldom gets actualized is the commonplace observation and inference of history studies.

This is the place where the historical novelist needs to take shelter under the psychological setup and mental makeup of the characters, historical personages, and the psychology of the public. He must gauge and guess about the probable situations and priorities, preferred by these men and women portrayed on the pages of history. The events of wars, famine, drought, flood, revolts, rebellion, and uprising are some such examples that are generally preferred by the historical novelist as the gravity and severity of these situations are much more responsible for creating the upheavals, having its effect as well as impact across the era.

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